

UfM Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Urban Development Zagreb (Croatia), 4th May 2023

HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DISCUSSION **Raising up to regional challenges through national solutions:** **Lessons learned and the way ahead** **14:30 – 15:45**

The High-Level Policy Discussion will be the second meeting of the UfM Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Urban Development, to be held in Zagreb on 4th May 2023. The High-Level Policy Discussion will offer, on the basis of the mandate to be adopted in the morning at the official UfM Ministers' meeting, a platform for to further elaborate and reflect in an in-depth manner on national experiences and regional cooperation. Such reflection will be based on the "UfM Urban Agenda", especially through the UfM Strategic Action Plan. It aims to provide a cross-sectoral and multi-dimensional long-term framework for urban transformation and sustainable and affordable housing across the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The Zagreb UfM Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Urban Development will also be a timely occasion for such strategic discussions since it will be taking place just a few months before the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (10-19 July 2023), which itself will review progress on the delivery of SDGs 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (Partnerships). During this forum, UfM members such as Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia as well as the European Union, will be presenting their Voluntary National Reviews reflecting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

One possible ambition for this High Level policy discussion could be to present the strategic questions it raised (or tackled) and the specificities of the Union for the Mediterranean approach to urban development at UN level at the occasion of the High Level Political Forum which will review Sustainable Development Goal 11 on Sustainable cities and communities on 13 July 2023. Such an UfM intervention s could contribute to raising up the strategic vision and perspective for the future of Mediterranean cities in the global context of the Un New urban Agenda, by sharing inspiring views, discussing long term transforming challenges, and forward looking potential solutions and corresponding territorial development models towards an international multilateral audience. It would highlight the ambition of the Union for the Mediterranean as an intergovernmental regional organisation to implement the 2030 UN Agenda and New Urban Agenda.

Agenda

Moderator: Dr. Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch and Global Solutions Division, UN-Habitat

14:30 – 14:35	Welcome and introduction
14.35 – 15.40	<p>Panel discussion :</p> <p>Mr. Bojan Linardic, Director of the Institute for Spatial Development part of the Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets of Croatia</p> <p>Ms. Nuria Matarredona (tbc), Director General for the Urban Agenda and Architecture at the Ministry of Transport Mobility and Urban Agenda of Spain</p> <p>Mr. Ariel Partush, Head of Foreign Affairs at the Ministry of Construction and Housing in Israel</p> <p>Mr. Yves-Laurent Sapoval, Senior Advisor at the Ministry for Ecological Transition at Cohesion of Territories of France</p> <p>Ms. Badria Benjelloun, Directrice de l'Urbanisme, Ministère de l'Aménagement du Territoire National, de l'Urbanisme, de l'Habitat et de la Ville, in Morocco</p>
15:40 - 16.45	Final remarks and closure

Objectives of the discussion:

- Reflect on the regional UfM dimension of urban development and housing
- Discuss views about the future of cities and urban policies in the Euro-Mediterranean Region, in particular in a post-Covid-19 context
- Discuss shared challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean context and strategic perspectives in light of common long-term global objectives (SDGs and New Urban Agenda) to be maintained while dealing with the current interconnected crises
- Bring attention to solutions to further advance the delivery of SDG 11
- Share some experience and ideas for further collaboration in the field, under the umbrella of the Union for the Mediterranean
- Refer to strategic areas of cooperation under the umbrella of UfM enumerated under paragraph 39 of the Ministerial declaration to be endorsed in the morning's ministerial segment

Guiding general questions for interventions:

- What is your vision for the future of urban development, and housing, within your context and taking into account global challenges?
- To what extent do we share similar challenges across the region?
- How has your country contributed to addressing those common challenges? What are your top priorities of action in these domains?

- How could your country benefit more from the work done under the umbrella of the Union for the Mediterranean as regards affordable and sustainable housing and the urban development sector?
- How could you benefit more from other countries' experiences on the definition and implementation of related policies and projects?
- What is your country's position as regards to urban cooperation within the UfM mandate?

Relevant background documents:

- UfM Third Ministerial Declaration on sustainable urban development adopted at the occasion of the Ministerial Conference of Zagreb
- UfM Strategic Action Plan for urban development 2040 and its accompanying plan on housing
- Voluntary National Reviews and EU VR of SDG 11 implementation
- World Cities Report 2022
- New Urban Agenda Quadrennial report 2022
- Declarations made by countries at the High-Level Meeting on the New Urban Agenda held in New York in April 2022

Context and scope of discussion

Urban Development as an opportunity to promote territorial cohesion, and the green and just transition

A vision for urban future is imperative to structurally transform cities and societies to face long-term challenges and operationalise the green, just, digital and demographic transition in territories.

There is a need for:

- Strategic frameworks in place relying on evidence-based policies and integrated urban development strategies
- Multilevel Governance and participatory approaches
- Public investments and Funding

The Mediterranean region faces multiple interconnected challenges to the sustainable development of its cities, towns, and communities. Given the megatrend of increasing urbanisation and the crucial role that sustainable urban development plays in the quality of people's lives, it was important for the UfM and its Member States to define a shared vision for coordinated territorial development. The UfM Strategic Action Plan on urban development 2040 is a key contribution to this process.

The Mediterranean region has one of the fastest urbanisation rates in the world. Currently, 60% of the region's population lives in urban areas. This urban population is expected to increase by an additional 22.5 million by 2030 due to internal migration away from rural areas (and immigration) and endogenous urban growth. Mediterranean cities already find themselves particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change such as water scarcity, droughts, forest fires and heatwaves, along with sea-level rise, coastal flooding and storms. The Mediterranean Basin is being hit harder than other parts of the world, as the temperature increase has already reached 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels which means that warming in this region is 20 per cent faster than the global average. Besides, Mediterranean cities face air pollution issues that severely affect citizens' health, posing a major risk for premature death.

Rapid and unplanned development of major urban areas has caused a fast decline of several historical city centres, raising concerns about the state of conservation of World Heritage properties, endangering cultural heritage, urban landscapes, and the unique identity of the Mediterranean region.

These topics raise multiple strategic questions regarding how to reinvent or adjust urban development, how to implement integrated urban development strategies and policies to make cities more green, more inclusive, while considering their overall territorial environment, that is to say territorial cohesion. The green and just transition of urban areas and structural transformative challenges accompanying these will be at the core of this discussion.

Topics to be addressed could be inspired from the ones raised in the UfM Third Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Urban Development, notably described in its paragraph 39: urban health, land management instruments for regulating coastal zones, port city transformation, heritage conservation-based strategies, valuation and dissemination of urban fabric, data, and financing.

Affordable and sustainable housing as a tool to improve the quality of life of all citizens

The pandemic, probably more than any other recent social challenge/crisis, has a) shown the crucial role of the State in providing public goods and adequate basic services, b) highlighted the significance of local fiscal capacity and inclusive, multi-level governance and c) underlined the centrality of adequate housing and the need to create neighbourhoods that are more ecologically sustainable. Housing and public services are major elements of people's living standards and there is a need to improve basic facilities and infrastructure for all.

The high prevalence of substandard informal urbanization, deterioration of the housing stock in historic urban centres, deterioration of traditional settlements and historic centres abandoned by their populations, issues around socio-spatial inequalities in access to water, transport, and green areas, as well as a structural crisis in affordability and of access to adequate housing are factors that affect the health and welfare of citizens and need addressing in an integrated manner.

Learning from the past mistakes or successes of others, with an innovative attitude, can provide a new source of inspiration for reshaping housing systems in a moment in which they are called to be more equality-driven, socially cohesive, environmentally sustainable and resilient and in which the public sector is called to play an entrepreneurial role in supporting the development of affordable and sustainable housing for everyone.

Topics to be addressed could be inspired from the ones raised in the UfM Third Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Urban Development, notably described in its paragraph 39: urban health, promotion of public policies and housing programme, setting up of housing observatories, boosting energy efficiency in housing through the set-up of national programmes or the improvement of legislation, valuation and dissemination of vernacular architecture and traditional building materials as a means to increase cultural embeddedness and climate adaption solutions, data, and financing.